
*Śaivism in the Gupta-Vākāṭaka Age**

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Abstract

One of the features of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age is the growth of Śaivism. In this article some of the epigraphical evidence for this process is assembled and discussed. While the direct evidence for the adoption of Śiva worship among the Guptas is limited to ministers of the Gupta court, it is clear that the Vākāṭaka kings were predominantly Māheśvaras. New fragmentary wall inscriptions uncovered from Mansar, the site of Pravarasena II's palace, hint at a possible connection with the teachings of the Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad. Two post-Gupta inscriptions from the area around Mandasor are discussed in the light of a tendency towards religious hierarchisation, an attitude which came to be increasingly characteristic of early medieval Śaivism. In the second part attention is drawn to the variety of Pāśupata and Māheśvara worship in the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age, as well as to the trifold organisation of the Pāśupata movement. The article ends with a note on the interaction with non-Śaiva traditions, in particular Buddhism, and its possible impact upon the formation of the Pāśupata movement.

Introduction: Śiva worship under the Guptas and Vākāṭakas

In a recent important study Alexis Sanderson shows, through detailed analysis, how Śaivism became the dominant Brahmanical religion in the early medieval period (Sanderson 2009). While Sanderson's study is concerned with the post-Gupta period, it is clear that this development did not come out of nowhere. In this paper I will present, by way of a few examples, some of the evidence attesting to the growing influence of Śaivism in the courts of the royal houses of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age. One of the main questions which this brings up is why and how was the ideology of Viṣṇu as *the* model of kingship abandoned in favour of the complex character of Śiva?¹ In the second part I will consider the identity of the kind of Śaivism which flourished in this period.

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¹Cf. also Sanderson 2009: 58ff.

As is well-known, the Gupta epigraphical records refer to the kings of the Gupta dynasty as *paramabhāgavatas*, which we can safely assume refers to their personal devotion to Viṣṇu.² However, it is also clear that theirs was not an exclusivist religion, for within the Gupta empire there is abundant evidence for the support of other religions as well, most notably Buddhism, Jainism, and Śaivism. Two Gupta inscriptions in particular are important, because they show the support of Śaivism by prominent members of the Gupta court:

- Karamdanda Inscription of the Reign of Kumāragupta.³

On octagonal base of *liṅga* at Karamdanda (12 miles from Faizabad), dated [Gupta] Śaṃvat 117 (= CE 436). Records a gift, on 10th day of Kārttika, by Pṛthivīśeṇa, Kumāragupta's minister (*mantrin*), for the worship of Mahādeva Pṛthivīśvara (i.e. his chosen deity); also mentions Mahādeva Śaileśvara.

- Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Candragupta II.⁴

Records excavation of a cave, out of devotion (*bhakti*), for Bhagavat Śambhu by Vīrasena, who came from Pāṭaliputra and was a minister of Candragupta II. The latter is reported to have come to the site with him (*rājñāiveha cāgataḥ*).

These two records attest to the adoption of Śiva worship by primary members of the Gupta court, while the Udayagiri inscription makes it clear that they were supported in their religious activities by the Gupta kings. On the other hand, no evidence exists to show that any of the Gupta kings themselves favoured Śiva as their *iṣṭadevatā*. On the contrary, the Bhāgavata faith remained a central characteristic of this royal house.

The situation is significantly different for the Vākāṭakas, their neighbours ruling to the south of the Vindhya. Members of the dominant, eastern branch of this dynasty were predominantly Maheśvara worshippers, with the noteworthy exception of Rudrasena II and his remarkable Gupta wife Prabhāvatī Guptā, both of whom followed the Bhāgavata faith of her family. Rudrasena I, for example, is standardly referred to in the Vākāṭaka pedigrees as “foremost among the devotees of Lord Mahābhairava” (*atyantasvāmimahābhairavabhakta*). This is in itself an important piece of evidence for the history of early Śaivism, because it is among the first attestations for the terrifying form of Śiva as Mahābhairava, quite probably referring to a deity housed in a specific temple, as Hans Bakker has argued.⁵ Subsequently the Vākāṭaka rulers used more general royal titles, such as *atyantamāheśvara* or *paramamāheśvara*, to express their faith.⁶

The name Śiva itself occurs in connection with the ancestral claim of Rudrasena that he descended from the Bhāraśivas, a “House that was installed by Śiva, who was pleased that its members wore His emblem, the *liṅga*, placed as a load on their shoulders”.⁷ In inscriptions

²On the epithet *paramabhāgavata* “supreme devotee of the Bhagavat”, see Willis 2009: 65ff.

³Konow 1909–10: pp. 70–72; Sircar 1965: pp. 289–290. For a new reconstruction of the problematic portion towards the end of this inscription, see Willis 2009: p. 303, n. 263.

⁴CII III: 33–36; Sircar 1965: pp. 279–280. See Willis 2009: p. 40 for a picture of ‘Cave 8’ at Udayagiri.

⁵Bakker 1997: p. 13, n. 23. This on account of the words *svāmi* and *bhakta*.

⁶The epithet *paramamāheśvara* seems to appear for the first time, in Prakrit form, in an inscription of the Śālaṅkāyana king Devavarman of Veṅṅīpura. For references to the publication of this text and discussion, see Sanderson 2009: p. 44, n. 7.

⁷*aṃsabhārasaṃmiveśitaliṅgodvahanāśivasuparituṣṭasamutpāḍitarājyaṃśa* (CII V: 12, ll. 4 f.; translation Bakker 1997: p. 20, n. 50).

of Pravarasena II, son of Rudrasena and Prabhāvatī Guptā, we encounter the repeated claim that he “established the Kṛta yuga [on earth] by the grace (*prasāda*) of Śambhu”.⁸ In the Patna Museum Plate he also claims that he “carried as his weapon the lance by the grace (*prasāda*) of Śambhu”.⁹ It is interesting to note that the name Śambhu also turns up in one of the new inscriptions uncovered from Mansar, at the site of Pravarasena’s royal sanctuary.¹⁰ Another such fragmentary wall inscription contains the word *prasāda* (‘grace’),¹¹ which once again brings to mind Pravarasena’s royal inscriptions. Although these new wall inscriptions are very fragmentary they do give us some insight in the kind of Śaivism followed by Pravarasena, in that they seem to highlight once again the concept of ‘grace of Śambhu’ (*śambhuprasāda*), a benevolent god who granted Pravarasena the authority to rule.¹² The fragmentary inscriptions also contain an intriguing reference to the Vedānta, i.e. the doctrine of the Upaniṣads.¹³ In this connection it is noteworthy that it is in the teachings of the Śiva-oriented *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* that the concept of grace (*prasāda*) plays a key role.¹⁴ In this Vedic text the former outsider Rudra is presented for the first time in a Vedic context as the One God (*eko devaḥ*) upon whose grace final liberation depends. If we also take into account the fact that the *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* is a text associated with the Taittirīya school of the Black Yajurveda and that the copper plate charters of Pravarasena show the king’s support of Taittirīya brahmins we can surmise that it was this Vedic school that provided the religious basis for Pravarasena’s Śaivism.¹⁵

Another potential source for tracing the Śiva devotion of Pravarasena and the Vākāṭakas, in addition to the epigraphical and art-historical material, is the *Setubandha* or *Rāvaṇavāha*, a Prakrit *kāvya* attributed to Pravarasena himself. The evidence for this attribution may be inconclusive but it is quite likely that it is a product of the Vākāṭaka period.¹⁶ Although the subject of the poem – the building of the bridge to Laṅkā – is by definition Vaiṣṇava, it is striking that after first invoking Viṣṇu in four verses, the author continues with four verses dedicated to Śiva. As Handiqui observes, this may well reflect the author’s Śaiva leanings:

⁸ *śambhoḥ prasādadhṛti(ta)kārttayugasya* (CII V: 12, ll. 15–16; 19, ll. 11–12; 24, l. 16; 30, l. 16; etc.). Mirashi corrects °dhṛti° to °dhṛta°.

⁹ *śambhoḥ prasādadhṛti(ta)śūla(tā)yudhasya* (CII V: 71, ll. 1–2).

¹⁰ ... [m] na vivarttinam // śambhor ... // ... rūpam / dvāra ... (Kropman 2008: p. 6, pl. 15). The new inscriptions were found on the south side of the temple at ‘Mansar III’. See Kropman 2008, for details and photographs of these inscriptions.

¹¹ *siddham/ manāḥ p ... // vedāntād dhyā[n] ... // ... prasādaś ca ... // tair upahriya ... //* (Kropman 2008: 7, pl. 17). Two more wall fragments are preserved: *tasya cārāḍhanāt prāpta ... , prāptavyam // ... va ... / ni ...* (ibid.: 6, pl. 16); ... *dyat[ē]/ rūpādigrāha ...* (ibid.: 7, p. 18).

¹² This may also be relevant to the question why Pravarasena II changed the expression of Rudrasena II, *bhagavataś cakralakṣmapratīṣṭhitaśāsanasya*, referring to Rudrasena’s Bhāgavata religion, into *bhagavataś cakrapāṇeḥ prasādupārjitaśrīsamudayasya*. This change has been noted by Bakker in his contribution to the British Museum symposium.

¹³ See n. 11 above.

¹⁴ *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* 3.20 *dhātuh prasādāt* (cf. *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* 2.20 *dhātuprasādāt*), *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* 6.21 *devaprasādāt*. Cf. also *Pāśupatasūtra* 5.40 *apramādī gacched duḥkḥānām antam tīśprasādāt*.

¹⁵ Willis (2009: pp. 221–222) reaches a similar conclusion on the basis of Pravarasena’s support of Taittirīyas in general and the *ācārya* Devaśarman in particular. Cf. also Mirashi’s observation regarding the *śākhā* affiliation of Vākāṭaka donees: “It is noteworthy that among the donees of copper-plate grants the *Rigvēdins* and the *Sāmavedins* are conspicuous by their absence, not a single grant being made to them. Among the *Yajurvedins*, the followers of the *Taittirīya śākhā* predominate, as many as six grants having been made to them” (CII: xlv). Of the six grants Mirashi refers to, five (nos. 3–5, 7, 15) were issued by Pravarasena II, while one (no. 8) was issued by his mother, Prabhāvatī Guptā.

¹⁶ Cf. Handiqui 1976: pp. 15–30 and Bakker 2008b.

“the emotional fervour of the verses (1.5,7,8) in which he invokes Naṭarāja Śiva might be an indication that, even though he venerated Viṣṇu as Rāma, his *iṣṭadevatā* was probably Maheśvara in his dancing form”.¹⁷ More research on this question is needed, but it is not altogether impossible to see in these eight opening verses an allusion to the concept of Harihara,¹⁸ which would have been particularly apposite in a Vākāṭaka context, because of the support of both Bhāgavatism and Śaivism by this royal house during this transitional period.

To express his devotion to his Lord, Pravarasena built the Pravareśvara temple at the new capital Pravarapura, which has yielded some of the most intriguing and beautiful Śaiva sculptures in existence, including the justly famous ‘Mansar Śiva’.¹⁹ Given the references to Śambhu in Pravarasena’s inscriptions it is tempting to see in this unique image an expression of the concept of Śambhu ‘the Benevolent’.²⁰ The name of the temple (*devakulasthāna*), Pravareśvara, is among the first examples of royal sanctuaries dedicated to a chosen deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) incorporating the ruler’s name. These temples became a characteristic feature of most early medieval kingdoms, in which Śaivism was the norm.

Two Inscriptions from Mandasor

While these records all attest to the royal support of Śiva worship during the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age, they do not show one particular feature of later Śaivism, which, arguably, made it so successful, namely its hierarchical, all-encompassing stance, integrating Brahmanism and Śaivism. Sanderson has supplied much evidence for this attitude in Tantric Śaivism in the early medieval period, but it is also central to early Śaiva Purāṇic literature. We can observe a trend moving in this direction in an inscription from the early sixth century: the ‘Mandasor Stone Inscription of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuvardhana’, dated Mālava (= Vikrama) Year 589 (= CE 532).²¹ The second benedictory verse reads as follows:

*svayambhūr bhūtānāṃ sthītilaya[samu]tpattividhiṣu prayukto
yenājñāṇaṃ vahati bhuvanānāṃ vidhṛtaye |
pitṛtvaṃ cānīto jagati garimāṇaṃ gamayatā sa śambhur
bhūyānsi pratidiśatu bhadraṇi bhava[tām] ||*

This is translated by Fleet, the editor of the inscription, as follows:

May he, (the god) Śambhu, confer many auspicious gifts upon you, – employed by whom in the rites of (*effecting the*) continuance and the destruction and the production of (*all*) things that exist, (the god) Svayambhū, is obedient to (*his*) commands, for the sake of the maintenance of

¹⁷Handiqui 1976: pp. 24–25. In addition to Naṭarāja another aspect of the deity invoked in these verses is Ardhanārīśvara: *Setubandha* 1.6.

¹⁸The number eight itself has a particular resonance in a Śaiva context, recalling as it does Śiva’s *aṣṭamūrti*, a concept which plays a prominent role in the works of Kālidāsa. Similarly one may note that the *Kumārasambhava*, Kālidāsa’s only work dedicated to a Śaiva subject, is constituted of eight *sargas*.

¹⁹This sculpture has been published a number of times. Cf. e.g. Bakker 1997: Plate XXXVII. For the excavations at Pravarapura and Pravareśvara, see Bakker 2008a.

²⁰For an interpretation of this icon connecting it to the figure of Nīlāhita, see Bisschop 2008.

²¹CII III: pp. 150–158; Sircar 1965: pp. 411–417.

(all) the worlds; and by whom, leading (him) to dignity in the world, he has been brought to the condition of being the father (of the universe)!²²

This verse makes, it appears, two central statements:

1. Śāmbhu employed Svayambhū (= Brahmā) for the tasks of creation, maintenance and reabsorption of the universe;
2. He bestowed 'fatherhood' (*pitṛtva*) upon him, causing him to be respected in the world.

Both statements indicate a hierarchical relationship between the two deities: Śiva is the ultimate master and Brahmā owes his position to him. The second statement requires some comment: while Fleet supplies "*of the universe*" it is in my opinion more likely that the poet refers here to the Brāhmaṇa myth according to which Prajāpati (here Svayambhū) is the father of Rudra.²³ While the inscription apparently accepts this father-son relation, it makes Śiva the active agent and thus reinterprets their relation.

The author(s) of the strongly Śaiva *Skandapurāṇa*, a text datable to the end of the sixth or early seventh century²⁴ and as such after the period under discussion, went a lot further. In its opening chapters the *Skandapurāṇa* turns the Brāhmaṇa mythology on its head, for here Brahmā, initially regarding himself as the first being out of ignorance, is made to realise that he is in fact the son of Śiva (SP 3.1–9). It also makes up for the Brāhmaṇa presentation of their relationship, for it tells that Śiva granted Brahmā a boon to be born as his son after he had been propitiated by him (SP 4.1–7). This 'son' is not really Śiva himself but a Gaṇa named Nīllohita Rudra, who chops off Brahmā's fifth arrogant head (SP 4.11–20, 5.22–66). This story shows a significant development in the religious imagination, in which the notion of Śiva's birth from the creator god was not acceptable.²⁵

A second example of this process of religious hierarchisation is provided by another inscription from the Mandasor area: the Rīsthal inscription, dated CE 512. This rich inscription contains a wealth of important information on the history of the Aulikaras of Mandasor, but is also relevant for the history of the later Guptas, as Richard Salomon has demonstrated (Salomon 1989). It records, among other things, that Bhagavaddoṣa, the viceroy of Prakāśadharman, "constructed in Daśapura the Prakāśeśvara Temple, the symbol of Bhāratavarṣa" (22). It continues to note that he built, "within that same city, a beautiful shrine of Brahman" (23) but also that he "built a shrine to Kṛṣṇa and one to Bujjuka as a refuge for ascetics who devoted themselves to (the practice of) Sāṃkhya and Yoga" (24).²⁶ Although this might be viewed as attesting to Prakāśadharman's tolerant attitudes towards religion in general, it is also clear that a hierarchical order is expressed, for, while

²²The verse following this invocation in the Mandasor Stone Inscription contains an intriguing early reference to the 'chaplet of bones' (*asthimālā*) on Śiva's head, which attests to the Kāpālika type of development of Śiva's iconography in the Mandasor area.

²³Cf. Deppert 1977.

²⁴For this date of the text, see SP IIA: 52.

²⁵Note, however, that a similar criticism is already attested earlier in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* 5.81cd, in Pārvaṭī's famous defense of Śiva: *yaṃ āmananty ātmabhūvo 'pi kāraṇaṃ kathaṃ sa lakṣyaprabhavo bhaviṣyati* "He whom they honour as cause of Self-born Brahma, how can his origin be determined?" (tr. Smith: 2005: p. 203).

²⁶*lakṣma bhāratavarṣasya nideśāt tasya bhūkṣitāḥ| akārayad daśapure prakāśeśvarasadma yaḥ|| 22|| tasyaiva ca purasyāntar brahmaṇaś cāru mandiram| unnāpayad iva vyoma śikharair gghanarodhibhiḥ|| 23|| āśrayāya yatnāṃ ca sāṃkhyayogābhiyog(in)ām| vyadhatta kṛṣṇāvasathaṃ bujjukāvasathaṃ ca yaḥ|| 24||* . Translations and text of this inscription all by Salomon 1989.

the Śaiva temple established for Prakāśeśvara, Prakāśadharman's *iṣṭadevatā*, is the main object of description and receives extensive praise, to the extent that it is even called 'the symbol of Bhāratavarṣa', the shrines to Brahman, Kṛṣṇa and the (probably local deity) Bujjuka, are simply listed as other examples of the numerous religious works performed by him. The incorporation of the royal founder's name as the first element of the name of the temple (X-*īśvara*) became increasingly characteristic for the building activities of kings in the medieval period and played an important role in the expression of royal ideology.²⁷ Prakāśeśvara may stand as an early example of the later royal temples which came to dominate the medieval landscape of India and beyond.

In the aforementioned study 'The Śaiva Age' Sanderson identifies five "key elements of the social, political and economic process that characterises the early medieval period", arguing that Śaivism was so successful in that period because it "legitimated, empowered, or promoted" these elements.²⁸ One of these elements is the "multiplication of land-owning temples", which involves among other things the phenomenon of royal temple building which I have just discussed. Another element is, in his words, "the expansion of the agrarian base through the creation of villages, land reclamation, and the construction of water-reservoirs, wells, and other means of irrigation, with the steady growth in population that these developments imply".²⁹ Now this element also plays a key role in the Rīsthal inscription, for one of the other main activities recorded in this inscription is the construction by Prakāśadharman of "this broad Vibhīṣaṇa Lake, which is a mirror-image of the Bindu Lake, dedicating to his grandfather, King Vibhīṣaṇavardhana, its great meritorious fruit of excellent dignity" (19).³⁰ Indeed the two main objects of the inscription are the temple and the lake, as becomes clear in the final verse:

As long as the wind blows, twirling the leaves of the vines and wafting the sweet perfume of the flowers, so long may this beautiful lake and this temple of Śambhu remain, spreading their glories and blocking the path of misfortune. (28)³¹

Thus in this early sixth-century inscription from Mandasor we find some of the quintessential activities of early medieval Śaiva kings referred to. As such it is important to note that the Śaiva kings of medieval India were not introducing a new practice, but were simply following a model that had already been established earlier, as is indicated by this inscription, recording the religious deeds of former feudatories of the Guptas. In fact, as Willis shows at length in his recent book *The Archaeology of Ritual*, the whole system of land grants and agrarian expansion under land-owning temples effectively starts with the early Guptas.³² One crucial element is still missing though: the king's initiation (*dīkṣā*) into the Śaiva fold by a tantric

²⁷Cf. Sanderson 2009: 274. There are earlier examples for the practice of eponymous naming of deities: cf. Willis 2009: p. 141. See also the example of Pravareśvara above.

²⁸Sanderson 2009: p. 253.

²⁹Sanderson 2009: p. 253.

³⁰*rajñe pitāmahavibhīṣaṇavardhanāya ślāghyānubhāvagurupūnyaphalaṃ nivedya| vistāri bindusarasāḥ pratibimbabhūtam etad vibhīṣaṇasaras samakhāni tena|| 19||*

³¹*keśalayaparivartī virudhām vāti yāvat surabhikusumagandhāmōdavāhī nabha(svān)| sara i(da)m abhirāmaṃ sadma śambhoś ca tāvad vihataduritamārgge kīrtivistāriṇī stām||*. °*vistāriṇī* is printed as °*vistariṇī* (unmetrical) in Salomon's edition, but the accompanying note on p. 6 indicates that this must be a typo.

³²See in particular Chapter 2 in Willis 2009.

rājaguru (cf. Sanderson 2009: 254 ff.).³³ But for that most important element we find in the Rīsthal inscription early medieval Śaiva kingship in a nutshell.

The Pāśupata Movement

As for the question of the kind of Śaivism in existence in the Gupta-Vākāṭaka age, as mentioned there is no evidence as yet of the existence of the tantric form of Śaivism, which involved, among other things, initiation of the king into the tantric fold. The Śaiva Siddhānta tradition was still in its initial stage of development, although the most ancient core of the earliest surviving Śaiva Siddhānta Tantra, the *Nīśvāsattattvasaṃhitā* (still unpublished), has been recently dated to ca. CE 450–550 (Goodall & Isaacson 2007). Instead, for the main agents involved in this period we have to look at the Pāśupatas, an ascetic movement of Śiva worshippers, whose basic text was the *Pāśupatasūtra*. Its commentary, the *Pañcārthabhāṣya* by Kauṇḍinya, may well stem from the Gupta period.

On the other hand, the precise identity of the Pāśupatas remains a complex topic. First of all there is the issue of Lakulīśa. In scholarly literature it is generally held that Lakulīśa, an incarnation of Śiva, was the historical founder of the Pāśupata movement and that he lived sometime in the second century CE. This view mainly rests on the famous Mathurā Pillar Inscription of Candragupta II, dated [Gupta] Saṃvat 61 = CE 380.³⁴ However, in fact there is no mention of the name Lakulīśa in that inscription nor of the term Pāśupata. What we do get is a lineage of teachers (*ācāryas*), the tenth of which is a certain Uditācārya, the donee mentioned in the inscription, who trace their origins back to Bhagavat Kuśika. This Kuśika is usually identified with the first of the four pupils of Lakulīśa. However, we have no evidence that the notion of Lakulīśa as an incarnation of Śiva existed at the time. The name Lakulīśa, or a variant of it, is attested for the first time only around the sixth century,³⁵ while the earliest images seem to stem from about the same period. Moreover, the inscription makes no direct reference to Pāśupatas but only to Māheśvaras, who are asked to do worship (*pūjā*) in the ‘teacher’s shrine’ (*gurvāyatane*). One of the intriguing aspects of the inscription is that it refers to some of the *ācāryas* mentioned as the ‘spotless students’ (*vimalaśiṣya*) of their own preceptor. This indicates first of all a fascination with an unbroken lineage of teachers, which remains characteristic for all forms of later Śaivism, but also, in stressing the word ‘spotless’ (*vimala*), a possible connection with the mysterious Vaimalas (‘followers of the Spotless one’), who are sometimes mentioned as a group of Pāśupatas in Śaiva tantric sources.³⁶

³³ However, see Willis 2009: pp. 221–222, regarding the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II and his *ācārya* Devaśarman. The earliest unmistakable epigraphical reference to Śaiva *dīkṣā* occurs in the ‘Amudalapadu Plates of Vikramāditya I, Year 5’ (*Epigraphia Indica* 32: pp. 175–184), dated CE 660. See Sanderson 2001: pp. 8–10, n. 6, for a discussion of this and two other inscriptions from the second half of the seventh-century recording the Śaiva Siddhānta initiation of three major kings. For the Amudalapadu Plates, see also Willis 2009: p. 270, n. 164, who notes that “[d]espite the Vaiṣṇava invocation, the plates record the gift of a village to Sudarśanācārya on the occasion of the king taking Śaiva *dīkṣā*”.

³⁴ Bhandarkar 1931; Sircar 1965: pp. 277–279.

³⁵ Cf. Bisschop 2006: p. 46, where I refer to *Skandapurāṇa* 166.25b, 166.29a, 167.129d and 167.169d. To this should be added the reference to Nakulīśvara in the *Śivadharmasāstra* (cf. Bisschop 2006: 30). The date of the *Śivadharmasāstra* remains to be settled: Hazra (1985) dates it between 200 and 500 CE, which seems to me too early. A sixth or seventh-century dating may be more probable.

³⁶ For this tradition, see Aciri 2008.

It is evident that much remains to be done on the Mathurā Pillar Inscription.³⁷ In a recent article, Diwakar Acharya has suggested a new reading of the crucial last line, proposing to read *caṇḍa* instead of Bhandarkar's *daṇḍa*:

*jayati ca bhagavā[n̄ caṇḍaḥ] rudradaṇḍo [ʼ]gra[nā]yako nitya[m̄]*³⁸

And always victorious is Lord Caṇḍa, [he who is] the rod of Rudra,³⁹ the foremost leader [of the Gaṇas].

As Acharya argues, this is relevant for the interpretation of the figure depicted on the pillar in front of the *triśūla*. Rather than it being a representation of an unknown deity Daṇḍa, as earlier scholars have taken it, he argues that it may in fact represent an early pre-Lakulīśa Pāśupata deity Caṇḍa, also known as Caṇḍeśa.⁴⁰ The figure of Caṇḍeśa itself has been put into a new light more recently by Dominic Goodall, in an article called 'Who is Caṇḍeśa?' (Goodall 2009), where he shows that, contrary to what has long been supposed, Caṇḍeśa is not exclusively a Śaiva Siddhānta deity from the Tamil-speaking South of India, but has a more complex historical origin, independent from Śaiva Siddhānta and not confined to Tamil Nadu. This again has a bearing on the interpretation of images of Lakulīśa, for given the potential for confusion between the two, as is convincingly shown by the studies of Acharya and Goodall, some of the images so far identified as Lakulīśa may in fact represent Caṇḍeśa instead. A possible Gupta example of this is a loose image from Nāchnā in Madhya Pradesh, which Joanna Williams in her *The Art of Gupta India* identifies as Lakulīśa, but for which, given that the main attribute is clearly an axe and not a club, an identification of Caṇḍeśa may be more appropriate.⁴¹

In a way the issue concerning the identity of the deity Caṇḍeśa is illustrative of a larger and complex subject, namely the still little-understood variety of Pāśupata and Māheśvara worship in this period. While there has been a tendency in scholarly literature to narrowly identify the Pāśupata cult with the religious system of the *sādhaka* outlined in Kaunḍinya's commentary

³⁷For the latest treatment, see Willis 2009: pp. 134–139. However, the suggestion put forward there, that the eponymous names of the two *lingas* Upamiteśvara and Kapileśvara should be taken "as both *tatpuruṣa* and *karmadhāraya* compounds" does not seem convincing. I see no reason why they should not be taken as regular *tatpuruṣas* alone. As a consequence I am not convinced that it is the teachers Upamita and Kapila, who have become *īśvaras* themselves, that receive the *pūjā* specified in the inscription. The two objects of worship are rather Śiva-*lingas* named after earlier *ācāryas*, following the well-established model of eponymous naming practice.

³⁸Acharya 2005: p. 208. As Hans Bakker has pointed out to me, even with this correction, the reading remains doubtful, because it is an unmetrical half-line of an *āryā*: a short syllable is needed before *rudradaṇḍo* (*sa?*) to restore the metre and *sandhi*. On the other hand the assumption that it is an *āryā* is not unproblematic: see Goodall 2009: p. 380, n. 92.

³⁹I understand *rudradaṇḍa* as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, in contrast to Acharya and Bhandarkar, who both take it as a *bahuvrīhi* (respectively "holder of the terrifying staff" and "whose staff is terrific"). I would argue that Caṇḍa (Caṇḍeśa) is invoked here as the personification of Rudra's rod, "a symbol of judicial authority and punishment" (Monier-Williams, s.v.). This interpretation fits well with Caṇḍeśa's role in early Śaivism, as chastiser of transgressions (see Goodall 2009: pp. 396–398). It is also in line with the immediately preceding passage in the inscription, which warns: *yaś ca kīrtyaḥhidrohaṃ kuryy[ā]d yaś cā[ḥ]bhilikhita[m̄] upa[r]ry adho vā [sa] paṃcābhīr mah[ā]pātakaīr upapātakaīś ca saṃyuktas syāt* (ll. 15–16) "And the one who damages the memorial, and the writing above or below, he will be invested with the five major and minor sins". The invocation of Caṇḍeśa seems appropriate in such a context.

⁴⁰A problem with this interpretation is that the figure does not seem to carry an axe (Caṇḍeśa's characteristic attribute) but a stick. There are also other weaknesses in this theory: cf. Goodall 2009: p. 380.

⁴¹Williams 1982: p. 113, pl. 163. Bakker (1997: p. 100), who discusses the image in connection with an image from Mandhal which he provisionally identifies as 'Gaṇādhyakṣa' (plates V and VI), also dismisses the Lakulīśa identification, without however considering the possibility that it might represent Caṇḍeśa.

on the *Pāśupatasūtra*, this in fact represents only one element of the tradition. The Pāśupata system as outlined by Kauṇḍinya involves a lifelong career of extreme asceticism, which is hard to reconcile with other early references to Pāśupatas, in particular epigraphical records. Thus, for example, the earliest explicit epigraphical references to Pāśupatas that we possess are at the same time among the earliest examples of copper-plate grants recording endowments for temple worship. These are the copper plates from Bāgh, which record the land grants given by the *mahārājas* of the Valkhās, who were very probably subordinates of the Guptas. The inscriptions themselves stem from the second half of the fourth century. Seven copper plates in total in this collection refer to Pāśupatas as recipients of grants for the performance of worship in temples (Nos. III, V, VI, IX, X, XII, XIV).⁴² Other religious communities are mentioned as recipients of these grants as well.⁴³ The deities under worship are not limited to the figure of Śiva alone, however, for among the names of gods to whom the grants were dedicated we encounter Nārāyaṇadeva (no. III), Mahāsenadeva (i.e. Skanda; no. IX) and Bappapiśācādeva (nos. V, VI, XII and XIV). The last one, perhaps a local form of Śiva, seems to be connected with the Pāśupatas in particular, as in two of the grants (nos. V and VI) only the Pāśupatas are mentioned as recipients. One of the grants (no. X) also records that a shrine to the Mothers (*mātṛsthānādevakula*) had been established by the Pāśupatācārya Lokodadhi in the village of Piñchikānaka.

What these grants show is that not all Pāśupatas followed the rigorous ascetic system of Kauṇḍinya, but that there were others who served the needs of a larger, lay Śaiva community. The mention of Nārāyaṇadeva among the gods worshipped moreover suggests that they could also fulfill priestly services in temples dedicated to non-Śaiva deities. The Pāśupata career outlined in the scholastic work of Kauṇḍinya, with its emphasis on lifelong asceticism, as such only represents one strand in a larger, complex religious field. In fact Kauṇḍinya's system itself clearly requires the existence of such *ācāryas*, who by definition can not themselves be engaged in the kinds of activities that the *sādhaka* has to perform on the stages of the Pāśupata path to liberation. Likewise there would have been a community also of those who have faith in such Pāśupata *ācāryas* and in the Pāśupata teaching, but who are tied to their own lives and can not take the large step of renunciation and consequent adherence to the Pāśupata *sādhaka*'s rules.⁴⁴ As such one may conceive of a Pāśupata community consisting of three segments: 1) *ācāryas* (such as Kauṇḍinya himself), 2) *sādhakas* (practicing the system outlined in the *Pāśupatasūtra* and Kauṇḍinya's commentary thereon), and 3) a community of the faithful (consisting of uninitiated, non-ascetic supporters/devotees).⁴⁵ For information on the third segment one has to look at more popular texts, such as the *Skandapurāṇa*, but in particular at the various texts which together make up the Śivadharmā corpus. These texts, such as the *Śivadharmasāstra*, the *Śivadharmottara* and the *Śiva-Upaniṣad*, are still much neglected, with the

⁴²Ramesh & Tiwari 1990. On the Valkhās and their records, see also Virkus 2004: pp. 108–115.

⁴³Besides Pāśupatas are mentioned the Ārya-Cokṣas (no. III; an early Vaiṣṇava sect), the Mantragaṇācāryas (no. IX) and the Bhagavacchiṣṭas (nos. XII, XIV).

⁴⁴Note that the Mathurā Pillar Inscription also appears to distinguish between *ācāryas* on the one hand and lay Māheśvaras on the other. The latter are asked to guard the property (*parigraha*) of the *ācāryas*: *naitat khyātyartham abhili[khyate] (l) [atha] māheśvarāṇām vijñaptiḥ kriyate sambodhanam ca (l) yathākāle[nācāryāṇām parigraham itī matvā viśaṅka[m] [pū]jāpuraskāra[m] parigrahapāripāyaṃ [kuryyā]d iti vijñaptir itī* (ll. 10–14).

⁴⁵I reproduce and expand here some of the points made by Harunaga Isaacson in an e-mail, dated 30 August 2009.

larger part of this corpus not having been properly edited.⁴⁶ In addition, Diwakar Acharya has recently discovered a number of Pāśupata manuals (*vidhis*), which likewise hint at a more diverse Pāśupata religious milieu, involving both an ascetic and a lay community.⁴⁷

Interaction with non-Śaiva traditions

The division into ascetic and lay community calls to mind the religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, where such a division was already in place for a longer time. It may well be that the Śaivas modelled themselves on these traditions, although we have no direct evidence for this. It is striking, however, that the iconography and life-story of Lakulīśa and the Buddha have shared characteristics. Both icons depict a human being in a seated posture, possessed of various divine or auspicious attributes. But for the distinctive features of the erect penis, the club and the matted hair, there is a strong resemblance between early depictions of Lakulīśa and the Buddha, which suggests that Buddhist (but possibly also Jain iconography) had a big impact in this formative period on the iconography of Lakulīśa. When we look at the life-story of Lakulīśa, the most striking feature is its emphasis on the humanity of God's descent. This is not a cosmic type of *avatāra*, as tends to be the case with the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, but it is the story of a God taking on human form, who wanders from place to place, initiates his four pupils at different places in the north of India and instructs them in His (Pāśupati's) teachings. This conjures up the image of the Buddha wandering through Magadha. The similarity may not have escaped the Pāśupatas themselves, for in a late passage of the *Skandapurāṇa* mention is made of Lakulīśa's (*laguḍīśvara*) wanderings, surrounded by his pupils, in Magadha. Eight sites (*aṣṭau sthānāni*) in Magadha are said to be connected with these wanderings, which once again brings to mind a Buddhist tradition, namely the eight great sites (*aṣṭamahāsthāna*) of the Buddha's life story.⁴⁸

That there should be such an interaction between these traditions in this period should not come as a surprise. It is noteworthy, for example, that some of the major Pāśupata sites are also places with a strong Buddhist connection. As examples may be mentioned the two cases just discussed, Mathurā and Bāgh,⁴⁹ but also Vārāṇasī, arguably one of the most important Śaiva places of all time, which is not too far from the Buddhist site of Sārnāth. Anyone reading Hsiuen-Tsang's travelogue cannot fail to note the constant references to Pāśupatas whom the Buddhist pilgrim encounters on his travels through seventh-century India.⁵⁰ The evidence is not limited to iconography and topography, but there is textual evidence as well, for one of the earliest quotations of the *Pāśupatasūtra* itself occurs in a Buddhist work, Bhā(va)viveka's *Mādhyamakahrdayakārikā*.⁵¹ The name of the author itself, it may be noted,

⁴⁶For a recent update on this material, see Goodall 2009: pp. 374–375, n. 88. The *Śivadharmasāstra*, the earliest of these texts, is particularly important, because, as Hazra has shown, "it is totally free from Tantric influence" (Hazra 1985: p. 296). As for the *Śivadharmottara*, Hazra observes that "[i]t belongs to those Pāśupatas who looked upon Lakulīśa as a great teacher (*guru*) identical with Śiva himself" (Hazra 1983: p. 204).

⁴⁷For an introduction to these *vidhis* and an edition and translation of the first of these, the *Samśkāraavidhi*, see Acharya 2007.

⁴⁸*Skandapurāṇa* 167.169: *magadhāsu smṛtāny aṣṭau sthānāni śaśimaulinalaḥ śiṣyair parivṛto yāni babhrāma laguḍīśvaraḥ tāni dṛṣṭvā bhavet sadyaḥ pumān pāpavivarjitaḥ*]. Cf. Bisschop 2006: p. 218, where a different explanation of these eight sanctuaries is put forward.

⁴⁹For Mathurā, see Srinivasan 1989; for Bāgh, see Verma 2007.

⁵⁰Cf. Beal 1884, Index, s.v. Pāśupatas (Po-shu-po-to).

⁵¹Cf. Bisschop 2007: pp. 14–18. Curiously, the references to the *Pāśupatasūtra* are found in Chapter Nine of this work, which is directed to the Mīmāṃsā school.

could hint at a possible earlier Pāśupata background, for names with Bhā-x or Bhāva-x are very common among Pāśupatas.⁵² In any case, it is intriguing that this sixth-century Buddhist author had access to the *Pāśupatasūtra*, an esoteric text in principle meant only for an initiated community of *sādhakas*. It certainly indicates the extensive exchange that took place between these different religious traditions during the period under discussion.

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⁵² As examples may be mentioned the Pāśupata teachers Bhāvavālmika, Bhāvasamudra and Bhāvaviripmchi, mentioned in the Amareśvara Temple Inscription (*Epigraphia Indica* XXV: pp. 173–185), and Bhāvatejas and his disciple Bhāvaabrahman, mentioned in the Tewar Inscription (*Indian Antiquary* XVIII: pp. 209–211). As for the name Bhā-x the best example is Bhāsarvajña, the author of the *Ratnaṭikā* commentary on the Pāśupata *Gaṇakārikā*. A passage of the *Nāṭyadarpaṇavṛtti* (kindly pointed out to me by Somadeva Vasudeva) makes this convention explicit: *aparāḥ pāśupatādivratī svasamayaprasiddhanāmabhiṣ vācyah| yathā pāśupatasya bhāpūrvam bhāsarvajña ityādi sambhāṣaṇam|* (*Vṛtti ad Nāṭyadarpaṇa* 4. pp. 50–52).

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